

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB284:
“An Act Increasing the Age from Eight to Eighteen Years for an Income-Eligible Person to Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless of Immigration Status”

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Gary Soffer , and I am a pediatric allergist in Greenwich, Norwalk and New Haven. I am also a faculty member of the Yale School of Medicine.

I stand in support of SB284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status is an important step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we all need and deserve. But our work doesn't end with expanding access up to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults.

Before I became a doctor, it is well known amongst my family and friends, I could not enter a hospital. The color of my skin would turn a pale green, my heart would race and my palms would sweat. It wasn't until I was forced to care for a loved one who was hospitalized that I finally overcame this phobia. Ultimately, I came to the realization that it was not the sight of those suffering that overwhelmed me but rather my inability to help.

As I followed my journey in medicine that reaction to the ill became an afterthought, I was able to care for those suffering and I no longer felt powerless. This was until I met Deena* in my allergy clinic. Deena was nine years old when she came to see me, only a few months, after leaving a detention camp in Texas. Like so many others she had been separated from her family, and alone. I knew nothing of her journey across the border and nothing of her plight but the trauma could be read on her face and felt from her body language. She was quiet, reserved and distrustful. Her mother shared Deena's medical history in tears, switching back and forth from the details of the story, and her own feelings of failure to protect her daughter. Deena, while held in the detention camp, experienced two episodes of anaphylaxis, the most severe form of an allergic reaction and her mother could do nothing. By the time she saw me Deena was avoiding several foods; without the help of allergy testing she would need to continue to avoid them. She also had no access to an epinephrine autoinjector, the life saving medication used during an anaphylactic reaction. Her mother, who was desperate for answers, saved enough money to come to our clinic, but the testing would be thousands of dollars a cost she simply could not incur without paralyzing her family with debt. While we were able to provide some care for her it was not enough, and now when I think about Deena those same physical sensations overcome me because I feel that same sense of powerlessness.

The seal of our incredible state of Connecticut reads “*Qui transtulit sustinet*” - “He who transplanted sustains”. To me, it suggests an obligation to support its residents to help them to sustain and eventually thrive, and that obligation is not solely for those born here. I am the son of an Iraqi refugee who sustained,

and ultimately thrived, because the country that took him in allowed him to do so. I now ask you to allow me to do the same for the next generation.

I support S.B. 284 ,and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all community members in CT regardless of age or status.

Thank you for your time,
Gary Soffer, MD

(*name changed for the privacy of the patient)